

# A Church of Closeness: What is God saying to our parish?

On March 21, 2021, Pope Francis announced that he would inaugurate a three-year synodal process, in which the entire People of God might be invited to embark on a 'synodal pathway' towards greater communion, participation, and mission in the life of the Church. Sr. Nathalie Becquart, Fr. James Mallon and Dr. Hannah Vaughan-Spruce will speak about the challenges and opportunities for synodality in your parish. We designed the 2.5-hour event programme below to engage your parish in conversation about how synodality can help you become a "church of closeness".

**Synodality:** The Church best lives out her identity when she makes real and tangible the communion of life and love between God and human beings. Synodality is a way of living and operating in our parish that makes this reality come alive. It has implications for how we lead, live together in community, serve those in need, and evangelise.

# Suggested Programme for In-Person Discussion Group

15mins      **Welcome everyone**

**Introduce the topic of the evening:**

“Today, we gather to discuss the challenges and opportunities of synodality as we become a church of closeness. What does it mean for our parish to operate synodally? How can this way of operating help our parish thrive and grow? As we listen to this conversation between Fr. James Mallon, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, and Dr. Hannah Vaughan-Spruce, open your hearts to what God may be saying to you now.”

**You could use the following to open in prayer – or pray in your own words**

“Holy Spirit, you are always at work in the Church and your work in us is always new. Pour yourself out upon us as we gather today. Open our eyes, minds and hearts to see you at work. Give us openness and docility to how you are leading our parish. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

60 mins      **Stream the webinar**

If you’re serving refreshments, now is a great time to serve them!

30 mins      **Invite people to gather in small groups of 4-6**

**Introduce the time of discussion:**

“We’ve heard insights from three leaders within the Church – now we want to turn to the local level and explore what God might be saying to us.”

You could have a facilitator for each group, or you could have each group facilitate themselves. Invite someone from each group to take notes and to be prepared to share the highlight from their conversation with the main group. 30 minutes for discussion would work well. Display the following questions on a screen (You can use the provided PowerPoint file included in this package):

- What resonated with you from this conversation? What challenged you?
- A ‘church of closeness’ comes about when there is a strong network of relationships among parishioners. It happens when parishioners are discovering and living out their gifts through ministries and callings, and when we are close to those most in need. Thinking of our parish on a scale of 1 to 10 – where 1 is

highly anonymous and 10 is highly close-knit – to what extent are we a ‘church of closeness’? Why do you give this ranking?

- What role do vulnerability-based trust and healthy conflict play in our parish life? What is one way we can grow in this area?
- Listening plays an important role before people come to faith. What opportunities do we have to engage those who are non-believers? What role do both listening and sharing the Gospel play?
- What is one next step we as a parish need to take?

An important part of the Synod process is listening to those for whom faith is not a lived practice.

15 mins      Give each group 1 minute to share the highlights from their discussion.

20 mins      Time of worship and prayer

We recommend leading everyone in a time of worship to open your hearts to how God is speaking to you. After 1-2 songs, introduce a time of silence to wait on the Holy Spirit. Invite people to be attentive to how God is speaking in their hearts – what words, pictures or lines from scripture are surfacing?

Invite people to consider the following question: *What is God inviting me to commit to personally?*

You could have people write their commitment on a post-it and during the prayer time come and place it on a prominent wall or other place where it can be seen.

As you close the time of prayer, share how amazing it is to see how God has been at work inspiring each person individually and communally to mission. The post-its represent how we commit to change from today.

Close and share any next steps, if relevant.

- End of Programme -

## Next Steps for Your Parish...

1. Take the conversation further! [Download](#) our FREE 'Three Keys' series: three parish sessions to guide you in exploring how your parish can answer God's call through **Evangelisation, Leadership and the Power of the Holy Spirit**.
2. Are you a priest? Divine Renovation's regional guides are here to accompany you, wherever you find yourself on the journey of parish renewal. Whether you have questions about Divine Renovation's principles and coaching, are curious about how you can get involved in your region, or simply want to learn more—they would be more than happy to [connect with you](#)!
3. To continue building parish relationships and to equip you to connect with those that don't go to church connect with our Regional Catholic Coordinators - <https://alpha.org/catholics>
4. For inspiring content and great conversations join us at Alpha Leadership Conference 2023 - <https://www.leadershipconference.org.uk/>

## Tips for Facilitating the Session

The event will look different in various contexts ranging from small gatherings that are very organic to larger gatherings that benefit from more structure. Below are a couple of possible roles for a successful gathering:

- **Host:** The host will serve as the key point of contact for the event as it happens. This person understands the purpose of the event and full schedule. The host will take the lead in:
  - Hospitality. The host publicly welcomes all participants and thanks them for making the time to be a part of this conversation.
  - Keep the event on time. It is important to respect people's time by ending on time. The host will make sure that the event stays on schedule.
  - Transitions. The host will help with the transition points throughout the program from the opening welcome to the end as outlined in the schedule.
- **Small Group Facilitator(s):** Small group facilitators are often helpful to ensure everyone is participating in the discussion and that there is progress through the questions in a reasonable manner. Welcoming the group and stating some basic ground rules can be helpful to set a small group discussion up for success, most importantly that everyone has an opportunity to share so not to go on too long.
- **Hospitality Lead:** For larger gatherings it will be helpful to designate one person to coordinate hospitality, ideally with a team. Hospitality elements can include a welcome area with greeters as well as table decorations and food appropriate for the pre-Lent celebrations specific to a given region.

- **Prayer Lead:** While the host could facilitate this section it might be helpful to designate one person to take the lead on this part of the program. If a musician is available, the prayer lead can coordinate the time of prayer with the musician.

## **Suggested Programme for an Online Discussion Group**

- 10 Mins**      **Introduce the topic of the evening:**  
 “Today, we gather to discuss the challenges and opportunities of synodality as we become a church of closeness. What does it mean for our parish to operate synodally? How can this way of operating help our parish thrive and grow? As we listen to this conversation between Fr. James Mallon, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, and Dr. Hannah Vaughan-Spruce, open your hearts to what God may be saying to you now.”  
**You could use the following to open in prayer – or pray in your own words**  
 “Holy Spirit, you are always at work in the Church and your work in us is always new. Pour yourself out upon us as we gather today. Open our eyes, minds and hearts to see you at work. Give us openness and docility to how you are leading our parish. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”
- 25 Mins**      **Create breakout rooms of 4-5 people.**  
  
**Introduce the time of discussion:**  
 “We’ve heard insights from three leaders within the Church – now we want to turn to the local level and explore what God might be saying to us.”  
  
 You could have a facilitator for each group, or you could have each group facilitate themselves. Invite someone from each group to take notes and to be prepared to share the highlight from their conversation with the main group. 30 minutes for discussion would work well. Display the following questions on a screen (You can use the provided PowerPoint file included in this package):
- What resonated with you from this conversation? What challenged you?
  - A ‘church of closeness’ comes about when there is a strong network of relationships among parishioners. It happens when parishioners are discovering and living out their gifts through ministries and callings, and when we are close to those most in need. Thinking of our parish on a scale of 1 to 10 – where 1 is highly anonymous and 10 is highly close-knit – to what extent are we a ‘church of closeness’? Why do you give this ranking?

- What role do vulnerability-based trust and healthy conflict play in our parish life? What is one way we can grow in this area?
- Listening plays an important role before people come to faith. What opportunities do we have to engage those who are non-believers? What role do both listening and sharing the Gospel play?
- What is one next step we as a parish need to take?

An important part of the Synod process is listening to those for whom faith is not a lived practice.

**Open the breakout rooms and close them after 25 mins**

10 mins      **Give each group 1 minute to share the highlights from their discussion.**

15 Mins      **Time of Prayer**  
We recommend leading everyone in a time of prayer and worship to open your hearts to how God is speaking to you. You may have someone willing to lead 1-2 songs of worship on the call, however if not we encourage to say a prayer to the Holy Spirit to do this.

Introduce a time of silence to wait on the Holy Spirit. Invite people to be attentive to how God is speaking in their hearts – what words, pictures or lines from scripture are surfacing?

Invite people to consider the following question: *What is God inviting me to commit to personally?*

You could have people write their commitment in the chat, as a visible sign of their commitment.

As you close the time of prayer, share how amazing it is to see how God has been at work inspiring each person individually and communally to mission.

**Close and share any next steps, if relevant**

### Next Steps for Your Parish...

1. Take the conversation further! [Download](#) our FREE 'Three Keys' series: three parish sessions to guide you in exploring how your parish can answer God's call through **Evangelisation, Leadership and the Power of the Holy Spirit**.

2. Are you a priest? Divine Renovation's regional guides are here to accompany you, wherever you find yourself on the journey of parish renewal. Whether you have questions about Divine Renovation's principles and coaching, are curious about how you can get involved in your region, or simply want to learn more—they would be more than happy to [connect with you!](#)
3. To continue building parish relationships and to equip you to connect with those that don't go to church connect with our Regional Catholic Coordinators - <https://alpha.org/catholics>
4. For inspiring content and great conversations join us at Alpha Leadership Conference 2023 - <https://www.leadershipconference.org.uk/>

If you have any questions, please contact:  
[events@divinerenovation.org](mailto:events@divinerenovation.org)